

Tar River Navigation Company ^[1]

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by Alan D. Watson, 2006

The Tar River—rising in [Person County](#) ^[2] and flowing southeast to Beaufort, where it becomes the Pamlico River—first drew legislative attention in 1784, when the [General Assembly](#) ^[3] directed the [Pitt](#) ^[4], [Edgecombe](#) ^[5], and [Halifax County](#) ^[6] courts to clear the river of obstructions in their respective jurisdictions. The Tar River Navigation Company was subsequently incorporated in 1816 and given control of the Tar from its source to Greenville and of its tributaries (except Fishing Creek, for which the Fishing Creek Navigation Company was incorporated by the same act). Capitalized at \$75,000, the Tar River company was permitted to charge a toll on traffic using the river to compensate for its efforts to improve the navigability of the Tar. The incorporating statute (amended in 1818) also promised a state stock subscription of \$8,000. From the outset the company faced almost insurmountable obstacles, not only from the river itself but also from opponents of [internal improvements](#) ^[7] in the region. Although investors subscribed to \$56,000 worth of stock, many subsequently refused to meet this obligation and the company had to bring lawsuits (settled by 1825) to force payment.

The Tar River Navigation Company contracted for the construction of a lock and dam at Pippin's Falls for \$3,110, but the contractor abandoned the work before completion. Concerned about protecting the public's investment, the legislature in 1823 instructed the state treasurer to withdraw the state's subscription to stock until he could determine that the company had been legally organized, that individual subscribers were buying their shares, and that the company agreed to have its operations managed by the Board of Internal Improvements. Apparently the company failed to meet these criteria, for the state only purchased \$1,200 of its \$8,000 stock subscription. According to an 1834 report by the Board of Internal Improvements, the stockholders had not met for many years; the company presumably was defunct.

References:

Guion G. Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (1937).

Charles C. Weaver, *Internal Improvements in North Carolina Previous to 1860* (1903).

Additional Resources:

Tar River Land Conservancy: <http://www.tarriver.org/> ^[8]

NC Business Hall of Fame: <http://www.historync.org/canals.htm> ^[9]

[Search results](#) ^[10] for the Tar River Navigation Company in the North Carolina Digital Collections

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Authors:

[Watson, Alan D.](#) ^[17]

Origin - location:

[Person County](#) ^[18]

[Edgecombe County](#) ^[19]

[Pitt County](#) ^[20]

[Halifax County](#) ^[21]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[22]

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